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**Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures**

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**REPORT ON OIE ACTIVITIES TO THE 40<sup>TH</sup> MEETING  
OF THE WTO SPS COMMITTEE**

Communication from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)

The following communication, received on 5 October 2007, is being circulated at the request of the OIE.

1. The OIE is pleased to provide this update for the information of SPS Committee Members. The topics covered in this paper are: 1) an outline of the OIE approach to the export of livestock commodities; 2) an overview of the September 2007 meeting of the Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission; and 3) a recent statement of Dr Bernard Vallat, OIE Director General, on the importance of improving animal health worldwide.

**1. OIE Approach to the Export of Livestock Commodities**

2. The OIE addresses trade on a commodities basis in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (the *Code*). The *Code* recommends science-based measures as appropriate to the risk of the relevant disease epidemiology for the export of commodities. ("Commodity" excludes live animals in its context). Where possible the *Code* includes alternative approaches, such as testing or treatment of product or sourcing animals from disease-free countries, zones or compartments.

3. Although the OIE constantly encourages countries to respect the *Code* provisions, the OIE is aware that Members do not always utilize the flexibility offered by the *Code* and understands the frustration of some countries seeking to export products using measures contained in the *Code* when trading partners insist upon imposing stricter measures. In an attempt to improve the situation, the OIE is preparing a guidance document on how to draw up and implement commodity trade measures, using examples drawn from the *Code*.

4. In response to comments from some OIE Members, the OIE is prepared to further examine any scientific evidence that boneless beef (deboned, matured, pH tested) may safely be traded regardless of the disease status of the exporting country/zone. The OIE agrees on the need to support commodity-based trade, however, the proviso is that it should be done in accordance with scientific principles and other requirements of the *Code*, including the quality and sustainability of veterinary services. The OIE is not in favor of the commodity-based approach without accepting the need to strengthen veterinary services, as this would give little hope for the country to achieve improvements in animal health and food safety. "Commodity based approach" can not be dissociated from a country's obligation to conduct appropriate surveillance for OIE-listed animal diseases in their territory.

## **2. Recent discussions in the Terrestrial Animal Health Standard Commission**

5. The Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission (the Code Commission) met in Paris on 17 - 28 September 2007. This paper contains a summary of the key points discussed by the Code Commission for information of SPS Committee Members. The full text of the Code Commission report will be placed on the OIE Internet site ([www.oie.int](http://www.oie.int)) later in 2007.

### **(a) Containment Zone**

6. The Code Commission is in the process of incorporating in the Terrestrial Code the concept of a disease containment zone. A containment zone is a particular example of zoning, which may be implemented with the objective of managing the trade disrupting effects of an incursion of disease into a country or zone that was previously free of the disease in question. At this stage, the containment zone has been discussed in the context of foot and mouth disease, but the principle could be applied to other diseases in the Code.

### **(b) Zoning and Compartmentalization**

7. Mindful of some confusion in the application of the concepts of zoning and compartmentalization, the Code Commission proposed some clarification of the Code Chapter of Zoning and Compartmentalization. The OIE is also developing general guidelines on the application of compartmentalization.

### **(c) Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)**

8. The Code Commission proposed to add text on safe trade in casings of small ruminants and pigs.

### **(d) Disease-free status: implication of infection in wildlife**

9. The Commission discussed the Code approach to infection in wildlife, noting that the approach taken to diseases differs. For example, findings of avian influenza (AI) in wild birds do not affect the AI status of the poultry in a country. A key factor to consider is whether the disease of interest is endemic in wildlife or occurring sporadically (e.g. incursions from a neighbouring country). However, the approach to avian influenza is to encourage reporting in both domestic and wild birds, to provide good, up-to-date disease information on a global basis and to help protect human health.

### **(e) Emerging and re-emerging diseases and bluetongue**

10. The OIE is continuing to work on the important topic of emerging diseases. Current issues include carriage of rabies virus in non-terrestrial mammals, such as bats, and the associated risks for human health. West Nile fever is an example of a vector (mosquito) borne disease that can infect humans, with fatal results. Equine encephalosis, which is caused by a virus in the same group as the bluetongue viruses, appears to be an emerging disease in Africa. The spread of vector-borne diseases including bluetongue, which has become more evident in recent years, may be associated with climate change and/or globalization.

11. The Code Commission discussed the situation with bluetongue in Europe and identified a possible need for the OIE to update its recommendations on bluetongue vaccines to help manage the disease and avoid unjustified trade disruption.

12. The impact of climate and environment changes on emerging and re-emerging animal diseases has been selected as one of the technical items for the 77th OIE General Session in 2009. An expert group will be convened to address this topic.

(f) Bovine tuberculosis

13. Wildlife can play an important role as disease reservoirs, including in bovine tuberculosis. The OIE is addressing the role of wildlife reservoirs through an expert group. In addition, the surveillance requirements for bovine tuberculosis were reviewed.

(g) Bovine spongiform encephalopathy

14. The Code Commission reviewed text in the Terrestrial Code on the production of gelatine, tallow and dicalcium phosphate, to reflect the different risk management considerations for the commodities.

(h) Avian influenza and Newcastle disease in poultry

15. No substantive new scientific issues had been raised by members on the Code texts on avian influenza, suggesting that the issues raised during the last few years have been largely addressed and the texts can be considered as stabilized. The OIE is working to harmonize the Newcastle disease chapter with that on avian influenza, given the practical reality that Members address both diseases in poultry with the same set of measures.

(i) Animal welfare

16. The OIE is continuing to develop guidance for members on animal welfare. Current work addresses methods for the control of dog populations, a topic that falls within the OIE mandates for protection of animal health, public health and animal welfare. One of the primary objectives of the guidelines is to help developing countries deal with the serious human health risks posed by free ranging dogs carrying rabies and other zoonoses.

17. The OIE will hold a 2<sup>nd</sup> OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare on 20-22 October 2008 in Cairo. Relevant information can be found at: [http://www.oie.int/eng/A\\_AW2008/home.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/A_AW2008/home.htm)

(j) The OIE Tool for the Evaluation of Performance of Veterinary Services (OIE PVS Tool)

18. The second edition of the *OIE Tool for the Evaluation of Performance of Veterinary Services (OIE PVS Tool)* will be released later this year, following an OIE Seminar for PVS assessors that will take place in collaboration with the Ecole Nationale des Services Vétérinaires (ENSV), an OIE Collaborating Centre for the Training of Official Veterinarians. The Seminar will be held at the ENSV in Lyon.

19. In response to a request for clarification of the status of the OIE PVS Tool under the SPS Agreement, the Code Commission advised that Code Chapters 1.3.3. and 1.3.4. are international standards and the *OIE PVS Tool* is a practical guide on applying these standards.

(k) OIE Guidelines on the design and implementation of identification systems to achieve animal traceability

20. The OIE is continuing to work on this important topic, with the development of recommendations in the Terrestrial Code. The First International OIE Conference on Identification

and Traceability will be held in collaboration with the Codex Alimentarius Commission in Buenos Aires, in 2009. Information will be placed on the OIE internet site shortly.

(l) The work of the OIE in Animal Production Food Safety

21. The OIE and the Codex Alimentarius Commission are maintaining collaboration in the development of all relevant standards. The OIE is completing standards on animal feeding and on the management of Salmonella in eggs and broiler chickens. An OIE/FAO "Guide to Good Farming Practice" is close to finalization and the OIE is developing a new guidance document for members on "the Role of the Veterinary Services in Food Safety".

(m) Redevelopment of the *Terrestrial Code*

22. The OIE is in the process of redeveloping the *Terrestrial Code* into two volumes, with a clearer separation of "horizontal" and "vertical" standards and more logical presentation of all information. The revised version of the *Terrestrial Code* will be released in 2008.

23. The next meeting of the *Terrestrial Code* Commission is scheduled on 10–14 March 2008.

24. The report of the Commission will be posted on the OIE internet site shortly (see [http://www.oie.int/tahsc/eng/en\\_reports.htm](http://www.oie.int/tahsc/eng/en_reports.htm))

### **3. Improving animal health worldwide is a priority**

25. By adopting the OIE's Fourth Strategic Plan in May 2005, our Member Countries decided to update our historic mandate. The OIE was created in 1924 with the aim of controlling the international spread of infectious animal diseases. Over and above this historic mission, our new mandate is now "to improve animal health worldwide". This considerably broadens our responsibilities since, not only does it require all our Member Countries and Territories to share the same political will, but new institutional and technical mechanisms will have to be developed at a national, regional and worldwide level.

26. To succeed, the OIE must now provide policy makers with the right information, arguments and tools for this political will to be exercised effectively and sustainably. These arguments must first and foremost be founded on a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the political, social and economic benefits to be gained by investing more in new national, regional and worldwide animal health systems.

27. Yet, to improve animal health, political will alone is not enough. The effectiveness of investments in animal health systems depends on good governance of the mechanisms intended to implement them. The Veterinary Services, including both their public and private sector components, are in the front line when it comes to improving animal health. Increasing their effectiveness depends on the mobilization of adequate human and financial resources, and on the application of the methods of good governance described in the OIE *Code* and democratically adopted in the form of international standards by the 169 Member Countries and Territories. Good governance requires both legislation and the necessary human and financial resources to apply it.

28. In order to improve animal health by making the Veterinary Services more effective, we need to be able to demonstrate that this field of activity qualifies as a "global public good". This needs to be backed up by solid arguments.

29. The sudden appearance of new risks to populations and agricultural sectors throughout the world, in an unprecedented context of globalization of pathogens and climate change, lies central to our argument.

30. It is easy to demonstrate that the prevention and control of zoonoses by implementing OIE standards and guidelines linked to the WTO/SPS Agreement are an essential component of public health policies. An analysis of the current avian influenza crisis is a perfect example of this argument, but there are many others (SARS, BSE, Rift Valley fever, rabies, etc.).

31. We must also mention the considerable economic and social impact of animal diseases on the rural economy of our Member Countries and Territories.

32. Leaving aside the economic and strategic importance of animal production sectors under constant threat from these diseases in rich countries, which have very often already eradicated them at great expense, livestock production plays a considerable role in the survival of poor rural communities in developing countries. The permanent threat that these diseases pose to livestock raised in poor countries is also a grave threat to poor rural and periurban communities. The losses they are currently suffering from animal diseases are already considerable and are on the increase.

33. It is important to reiterate that the control of animal diseases makes an important contribution to the fight against poverty throughout the world, in terms of both public health and support for the economic and social development of the populations and countries concerned.

34. This argument is backed up by an analysis of the current regional and global flow of trade in animals and animal products. Exports can in some cases offer a precious source of income for developing countries and their rural producers, but for sanitary reasons this outlet is very often closed to them. Effective control of animal diseases in these countries would therefore help to give them access to valuable markets from which they are currently barred as they are not yet able to control or eradicate the most important of these diseases.

35. Investing in new animal health systems throughout the world thus helps not only to protect countries from natural or intentional threats linked to the reintroduction of infectious animal diseases and zoonoses that they have already succeeded in eliminating, but also to safeguard public health, reduce poverty and open to all the possibility to trade their agricultural products freely with the rest of the world. The OIE will deliver these messages loud and clear wherever they need to be heard. At the same time, we are working with economists to provide policy makers with convincing arguments backed up by figures.

36. By evaluating Veterinary Services' compliance with its quality standards, the OIE can also identify priority areas for investment on behalf of the national Veterinary Services in each Member Country or Territory that so wishes. The ultimate aim is to ensure that veterinary surveillance networks are in place everywhere, since early detection of diseases and an immediate response are the keys to effective prevention and control of natural or intentional sanitary disasters.

37. Nearly 40 countries are currently being evaluated by experts trained and certified by the OIE. The World Animal Health and Welfare Fund, set up by the OIE in 2004, is dedicated to this evaluation and analysis activity and to providing continuing education in the OIE's five regions for national officials in charge of modernizing the Veterinary Services and maintaining relations with the OIE as well as for relevant private sector representatives.

38. In carrying out its new mandate, the OIE will also continue to give top priority to its scientific and technical missions relating to the permanent updating of disease control methods.

39. In addition to providing the communication needed to ensure that these control methods are applied effectively by adequately resourced Veterinary Services everywhere, it is essential to form alliances with intergovernmental organizations such as the WTO, FAO and the WHO and with relevant regional organizations, not forgetting key private sector partners such as organizations of producers, veterinarians, processors, and catering and distribution chains.

40. Lastly, we must bear in mind that animal health is a crucial factor in ensuring food safety and an essential component of animal welfare. This explains why consumers and animal welfare groups actively support the fulfilment of our new mandate.

41. There can be no doubt that improving animal health is a global public good: more than 120 countries need help to reach a situation that is satisfactory for them and does not pose a sanitary risk to other countries. This is clearly a highly relevant area for the expression of international solidarity, in the interest of us all.

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